

# The Open Mike<sup>District 2</sup>

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A Newsletter From Councilman **Mike Knapp**

Volume 2, Number 1

Winter 2006

## **A Moment at the Mike**

### **Getting Around: Strains, Trains, and Automobiles**



Getting around in the Upcounty is always an adventure. Our region of the county is home to some of the most scenic drives in Maryland, and exploring the many backroads that wind among through the Ag Reserve and past the Upcounty's countless farms and small towns can be an exhilarating way to spend an afternoon. Still, there are times when getting around – and to and from – the Upcounty can be a bit more than even the most adventurous driver cares to undertake.

The morning commute, for example, for those who must travel from the Upcounty into the District or other parts south, is an exercise in timing and exploration to find just the right route and just the right time to leave in order to keep your trip as short and free of congestion as possible.

Believe me, I not only I understand your frustration, I share it. Neither I nor any of my staff live in Rockville where the County Council offices are located; we're commuters, too. Every morning, we're all out there with you, making our way toward Rockville on varying routes, and when we reach the office, we swap stories about who had the longest, shortest, or most interesting commute that morning. So, we can relate.

I'm trying to make things better. And working together, we're slowly getting there -- but we've got many years of insufficient resources to overcome, so it's going to take some time.



**Councilmember Mike Knapp**

One of the problems we're working to overcome is the aggravating fact that, for those of us who live in the Upcounty, our public transit options are limited. Metro, the most popular mass transit system in the Greater Washington DC area, only runs to Shady Grove -- so even if you take the Metro to work in the District each day, chances are you had to get in the car and fight traffic to get from the Upcounty to the Shady Grove Metro Station. And if you didn't want to sit in traffic, you likely left your home before the sun came up.

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Metro is a key part of our community's transportation infrastructure, and we must ensure that it is there to meet our needs well into the future. I think we can move closer to making that vision a reality if we can prove we can take good care of the system we already have, then work to expand it. To that end, as Chairman of the Transportation Planning Board (TPB) – the federally-mandated body responsible for transportation planning for the entire Greater Washington Metropolitan region – I'm working to provide a dedicated source of funding for Metro.

What this means is, rather than rely on revenues generated by passengers to keep Metro running, all affected jurisdictions – Virginia, Maryland, and Washington, DC – will commit a certain amount of funding each year specifically for Metro maintenance, upkeep, and improvement. With such increased funding, there would also have to be an improved oversight mechanism to ensure these funds are used effectively to improve all aspects of our transit system.



**Incoming TPB Chairman Mike Knapp and outgoing Chairman Phil Mendelson at a COG meeting in December 2005. (photo courtesy of COG)**

The Washington, D.C. City Council recently introduced legislation to set aside 0.5 percent of its retail sales tax for Metro, while in Virginia, two regional transportation bodies have agreed on a joint recommendation to Virginia lawmakers to levy an additional sales tax of .25 percent. Both of these proposals would be contingent on Maryland making a similar commitment. To that end, I'm lobbying my colleagues and our state lawmakers about finding ways Maryland can provide a dedicated source of revenue for Metro. I'd like to hear your views on this as well, so drop me a line or e-mail me.

There's another public transit option that's been under consideration for more than a

decade to connect the Upcounty to the Shady Grove Metro via a light rail system. Known as the Corridor Cities Transitway (CCT), this project is envisioned as a 31-mile light-rail system that would run parallel to the I-270 from Shady Grove to connect to the US 15 in Frederick County.

As part of this study – begun in 1994 and released in 2002 under the official title of *The I-270/US 15 Multi-modal Corridor Study* – the State examined issues relating both to the CCT and the widening of the I-270 as options for reducing the crush of traffic in the Upcounty region. The County Council recently asked the Maryland Transit Administration (MTA) for an update on progress toward the CCT, and on January 26 we were briefed by the MTA.

Frankly, what they had to tell us wasn't encouraging. To my frustration, the State has gone back to remodel many of the elements in its 2002 study. Apparently, the Federal Transit Administration has asked the State for more information, so the state is working to provide a new study relating to all the potential alternatives for the CCT and the widening of the I-270 by Spring 2007. At that point, a preferred alternative will be identified so the

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State and affected counties (Montgomery and Frederick) can move forward on design and engineering – provided the funding is made available not only by Montgomery County, but also by the State of Maryland and Frederick County. **If funding isn't available in 2007, work on this project will stop.**

For this reason, **it's critical that you let your elected officials at both the county and State levels – including the Governor – know that you will hold them accountable for providing sufficient funding for the CCT project.** I'm actively supporting this project and am working in our county to identify – and then allocate – the funding needed to move this project from paper to reality. But I need your help to convince leaders in Rockville, Frederick, and Annapolis that this project is vital.

While the CCT is a project in the works, we still have a number of existing options to move in and around the Upcounty. The county's Ride On buses are always a viable option, but moving over long distances in the county via bus can take time. Taking the bus from Damascus to Rockville, for example, can take as long as 90 minutes – and that's assuming you can catch the ever-reliable 90 Ride On Bus in time to avoid a lengthy wait for a transfer at Shady Grove. Given that a trip by bus can often take longer than it would even if one were sitting in traffic, many would-be commuters choose to sit in their own cars, with their own radio and CDs, rather than take the bus.

Again, we're working to improve bus service across the county, and I applaud the action that was taken by the county's Division of Transit Services last year to provide new routes in and around the Germantown area. While our buses are relatively efficient, the size of our county makes it difficult to provide short routes in many areas, and we need to do more to make getting around by bus quicker and more convenient. Many folks have suggested, for example, that the county install express shuttle buses that would go directly from one specific community – such as Poolesville or Damascus – to the Shady Grove Metro, with no stops in between. That's certainly something I'm willing to explore.

And then there's MARC.

As readers of *The Open Mike* know, when MTA recommended closing the Boyds and Dickerson MARC station, I argued fervently – along with everyone else in the Upcounty, for that matter – that those stations should remain open. At the public hearing in Barnesville on January 5, I maintained that MTA was trying to fix a problem that didn't exist – if anything, I argued, the Upcounty needed more mass transit options, not less – and that the state should have consulted with county government before it made such a drastic recommendation. I was proud to stand with so many county residents, and I had hoped that the points we all made in Barnesville would resonate with MTA.

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**The fact that MTA issued its final decision less than 24 hours after the January 9 deadline for public comment suggested to me that the decision to close these stations was pre-ordained, regardless of what information may have been brought to MTA's attention at the hearing.**

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Imagine my surprise, then, when MTA issued its final decision to close the Boyds and Dickerson stations less than 24 hours after the period for public comment had closed. The fact that MTA issued its final decision less than 24 hours after the January 9 deadline for public comment suggested to me that the decision to close these stations was pre-ordained, regardless of what information may have been brought to MTA's attention at the hearing.

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Suffice it to say, I was extremely disappointed and frustrated with MTA, and immediately sent a letter to Secretary Flanagan to let him know of my displeasure. As I said in my January 10 letter to Secretary Flanagan:

Despite the fact that every speaker at the public forum not only advocated for the stations to remain open, but also cited reasons why MTA's decision was based on faulty or incorrect assumptions, I can only assume the final decision was fait accompli and that MTA had no intention of budging from its original decision, regardless of what might have been learned at the forum... frankly, it defies belief that MTA could adequately digest and consider public input in the 20 hours between the 5 p.m. deadline for public comments and the time I received a call from MTA notifying me of your decision.

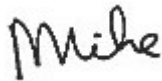
I have yet to receive a response from Secretary Flanagan, but I'll let you know what I hear. In the meantime, I am regularly making trips to Annapolis to meet with our State delegation to determine what steps might be taken to overturn MTA's decision.

Finally, I know roads remain a regular concern to residents, and I'll continue to work to to increase funding for transportation projects in this year's capital budget, just as I did in the budget two years ago. I also regularly notify the Montgomery County Department of Public Works and the Maryland State Highway Administration of roads that need repairing in the Upcounty. It often takes time to put a road on the repair list, and once it does go on the list, it falls into line behind other requests, which means it sometimes doesn't get repaired as quickly as local drivers like. The County is working to improve its ability to build and repair roads more quickly; one of the biggest things we as a county can do is continue to invest in roads and other related infrastructure like sidewalks – budgets which have historically left much to be desired.

One last thing: while you're driving – and especially while you're exploring those back roads in the Upcounty – please be careful. I've been very distressed by the number of accidents that seem to be occurring with greater and greater regularity in our region, especially on the two-lane state highways, like the 124 or the 27. Slow down, stay alert, and use extra caution when driving at night – some of those stretches of state highway can get awfully dark.

As always, feel free to contact me if I can be of service to you. It's my pleasure to serve.

Regards,



Mike Knapp  
Councilmember, District 2



#### CONTACT ME

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## Council Begins Consideration of Damascus Master Plan Amendments

On January 24, the County Council held a public hearing to discuss amendments to the Damascus Master Plan. We heard lots of engaging testimony from area residents, all of whom were very passionate about their vision of Damascus, and equally as fervent in their commitment to ensuring that growth occurs in a manner that keeps the character of the nearly 200-year-old community intact. **The public hearing that began on January 24 hearing will continue on Tuesday, February 28, at 7:30 p.m.**



***The Damascus United Methodist Church, a local landmark since the 1800s.***

The existing Damascus Master Plan was approved and adopted in 1982 and has been amended twice, the most recent amendment in 1985. In May 2002, the County Council asked the Park and Planning Division to begin the process for amending the Damascus Master Plan.

Apart from the input we receive during the recent public hearings, this Master Plan amendment will provide an opportunity to review and incorporate the recommendations of other plans and policies that have been adopted since the 1982 Damascus Master Plan and its 1993 amendment.

**Additionally, the Council's Planning, Housing and Economic Development Committee will hold a work session to discuss the Damascus Master Plan on Friday, February 17, at 9:30 a.m.**

*An online version of the Public Hearing Draft of the Damascus Master Plan is available at:*

*[http://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/redirect.asp?redirect=http://www.mc-mncppc.org/community/plan\\_areas/rural\\_area/planning\\_process/public\\_hearing\\_draft/index.shtm](http://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/redirect.asp?redirect=http://www.mc-mncppc.org/community/plan_areas/rural_area/planning_process/public_hearing_draft/index.shtm)*

## Knapp Condemns Racist Graffiti at Upcounty Schools, Churches

***"These acts have merely strengthened our resolve to stand together against such crimes..."***

In the second week in January, Upcounty citizens awoke to find racist graffiti had been scrawled on Seneca Community Church, St. Mark's United Methodist Church, Boyds Negro School, Quince Orchard High School, and Ridgeview Middle School. Montgomery County Police have determined that these acts are related, and are rightly treating them as hate crimes.

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Rather than causing fear or dividing our community along racial lines -- as its perpetrators likely hoped -- these acts served to strengthen our mutual resolve to live with, work with, and respect each other based on, as Dr. Martin Luther King once said, the content of our character rather than the color of our skins. I was proud to stand with Timothy Warner, the pastor of St. Mark's, and other county leaders several days later as we denounced the acts and took strength in our diversity, then covered the graffiti with a fresh coat of paint.

I issued a formal statement on this matter on January 11, and the brief remarks I delivered at St. Mark's the day we painted over the graffiti appear in the box below.

It's been an enormous honor, as well as very humbling, to discuss the state of racial relations in Montgomery County with community leaders and advocates. While we all acknowledge our diversity, we also recognize that mutual sense of community is what strengthens us all.

**Remarks of Councilmember Mike Knapp  
St. Mark's United Methodist Church  
January 17, 2006**

"Every decent citizen of our community, county, state, country, regardless of his or her race, is right to be disgusted by this; these acts are heinous and small-minded, and such racism and bigotry are an affront to all of us. They will not be tolerated, and the County is rightly treating these acts as hate crimes.

"These acts have merely served to strengthen our resolve -- our resolve to stand together against such crimes and those who commit them. We do so not out of a sense of revenge, aggression or retaliation -- three things Martin Luther King warned us against embracing -- but rather out of a sense of justice, fairness, and respect for one another. While Dr. King's dream of peace and harmony might, at times, appear tantalizingly close, the actions of what we hope are only a few narrow-minded individuals are an unfortunate reminder that we still have much work to do to make his dream a reality.

"Hatred is a consolation only to small minds. So while we are outraged and appalled, and perhaps pity the perpetrators of these actions, we do not hate. The poet Percy Shelley once wrote that, "There is no sport in hate when all the rage is on one side." We do not hate. Taking Dr. King's words to heart, we search for understanding, but not for retribution.

"Ralph Ellison, in the epilogue to his book *Invisible Man*, wrote: "America is woven of many strands; I would recognize them and let it so remain...Our fate is to become one, and yet many." The Upcounty personifies Ellison's vision of America. We in the Upcounty draw great strength and solace not only from our diversity, but also from our mutual sense of community. Respect for our differences is what drives our respect for each other as neighbors and citizens.

"And that's why these acts are an offense to all of us -- for they are an offense not to just one particular group, but to an entire community. We will stand together against such crimes and those who commit them."

## **Vox Pops**

### **Voices From Around the Upcounty Community**

*A Note from Mike: I receive countless phone calls, e-mails, and letters each day. Most are passionate, many are frustrated, and a few are downright funny...but all of them are thoughtful and well-intended. I think readers of The Open Mike will be interested to hear what their Upcounty neighbors have to say, whether they're across the street or across the county. With that in mind, the "Vox Pops" section of my newsletter features highlights from some of the correspondence and phone calls I've received in my office over the past month.*



"My idea is that anyone with a Medicare Card (link to the scanner system) would be admitted to the swimming complexes free. Like me, the seniors are paying the same taxes, no kids in school, and ol' folks would really benefit from using the pool and hydrotherapy. It's a no-brainer, win-win. Wouldn't really cost the county much, and the savings to the seniors at around \$45/month would be awesome. Look forward to your comments." -- *Ellen*

"...I know that the Council would like to finish its work on the Ag Reserve so it can focus on other critical legislative matters. My suggestion would be to adopt the following three measures to preserve the Reserve. 1) Force the clustering of new developments in the Reserve by removing any open space or agricultural tax relief for properties in new developments that are not clustered. Faced with a \$50,000 a year tax bill for a twenty-five acre lot, most developers will be hard pressed to find buyers. 2) Approve a ZTA that creates a "Super TDR" that carries a higher value for the current buildable TDR- I think Floreen is already working on such an idea. 3) As for "Tot Lots," any house built for a child will use up one of the allowed houses for a property, but it will not extinguish the TDR as long as a family member is in the house. In other words, the farmer can build for his/her children and is not penalized by losing equity. If the above measures do not work, then I fear that nothing will and the Reserve is doomed more by the inadequacies of human nature than that of a rule or regulation." -- *Sewall*

"Thanks for your support of the Ag Reserve. Now we must limit the size and scope of PIFs in the Reserve permanently, and find ways to provide space for PIFs elsewhere in the county. If the Derwood Bible Church land would allow 9 homes that would equate to 28 to 30 people living there, then perhaps that should be the limit to preserve the land as was intended several years ago." - *Tom and Carole*



"I have attended two meetings and have been impressed with the county council's performance. As a local church member I appreciate the fact that churches need to serve the community. The large churches need to be in the higher population zones to keep driving distances down.(Smart Growth makes sense!) The Knapp ammendment with the added wording on Peak Flow for PIFs would keep the size of PIFs to match the character of a rural/farming community. Overall I would love to see our county commit to keeping the agricultural preserve free from future development. The zoning text ammendments which clear up some loopholes are much appreciated! Farmland is disappearing too rapidly and this is our chance to keep a valuable asset for all of us." -- *Ruth*

### ***The Open Mike Wants You!***

*Are you sponsoring an event or having a meeting, and want to invite residents from around the county to participate? Did you or your organization win an award? If you have information you'd like to submit for possible inclusion in an upcoming issue of The Open Mike, please e-mail us at [Brian.Jones@montgomerycountymd.gov](mailto:Brian.Jones@montgomerycountymd.gov) and let us know.*

## **Public Hearings Calendar**

### **Council Seeks Your Input on Budget, Capital Improvements Program**

Don't be shy! The County Council regularly holds public hearings at which we actively seek your input, thoughts, comments, and suggestions. In February, we will be holding three day's worth of public hearings on the budget and capital improvements programs -- two areas that have an immediate impact on our county's pocketbook, and thus on yours. For this reason, I encourage all residents to attend the public hearings and give us your views.

Hearings are held in the Council's main meeting room on the 7th Floor of the County Office Building at 100 Maryland Avenue in Rockville.

**If you wish to testify on any of the items listed below, please call (240) 777-7931.**

DATE	TIME	MATTERS UNDER CONSIDERATION
February 7	1:30 p.m.	Resolutions to approve: - <b>Franchise Agreement for Use of Public Right-of-Way:</b> Looking Glass Networks, Inc. - <b>Franchise Agreement for Use of Public Right-of-Way:</b> NextG Networks Atlantic, Inc. - <b>Franchise Agreement for Use of Public Right-of-Way:</b> Fiberlight, LLC.
	7:00 p.m.	<b>FY2007 Capital Budget and FY2007-2012 Capital Improvements Program</b>
February 8	7:00 p.m.	<b>FY2007 Capital Budget and FY2007-2012 Capital Improvements Program – MCPS</b>
February 14	1:30 p.m.	<b>Supplemental Appropriations to the County Government's FY2006 Capital Budget and Amendments to the FY2005-2010 CIP:</b> - DEP: \$968,000 for Montclair Manor Flood Mitigation - DPWT: \$262,000 for Glen Echo Park - DOP: \$1,190,000 for Vehicle Recovery Facility - DPWT (DSWS): \$7,211,000 for Transfer Station Improvements
	1:30 p.m.	<b>Amendment to County Government's FY2005-2010 CIP:</b> - DPWT (DSWS): Gude Drive Processing Facility
	1:30 p.m.	<b>Special Appropriation to the MCPS' FY2006 Capital Budget and Amendment to the FY2005-2010 CIP:</b> - \$3,300,000 for Seven Locks Elementary School Replacement
February 16	7:30 p.m.	<b><u>Bill 1-06:</u></b> Personnel -- Special Days of Commemoration
February 28	1:30 p.m.	<b><u>ZTA 06-01:</u></b> Rural Village Center Overlay Zone, Revisions <b><u>ZTA 06-02:</u></b> Mixed Use Town Center Zone, Revisions <b><u>ZTA 06-03:</u></b> Rural Neighborhood Cluster Zone, TDR Option <b><u>ZTA 06-04:</u></b> Rural Neighborhood Cluster Zone, Rural Open Space
	7:30 p.m.	<b><u>Damascus Master Plan</u> (continuation)</b>